

Muslim fasting from a medical point of view. What should we know?

Ramadan is a month of obligatory fasting and one of the five pillars of Islam—the basic precepts of Sharia law that form the foundation of the Islamic faith. According to legend, the first revelation was sent down to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) on one of the nights of Ramadan. “The month of Ramadan is that in which the Qur’an was sent down as a guidance to mankind, clarifying the guidance and measuring [good and evil]. Whoever reaches it, let them fast during it” (2:185). In other words, whoever decides to fast as a form of devotion (in addition to charity) should fast during Ramadan, as it is a special month—the month of the revelation of the Qur’an.

Ramadan is a time when Muslims focus on their faith, distancing themselves as much as possible from everyday worries.

In Russia, Muslim fasting is called *uraza* (abstinence) or *orudj* (in Azerbaijani), and it lasts for 29 or 30 days during Ramadan. To have the fast accepted, it is important to have a clear intention. Muslim fasting implies dedication to Allah and self-control over one’s desires (such as food, drink, and intimacy). Believers are forbidden to eat and drink from dawn, at the time of the morning prayer, until sunset, at the evening prayer. The peculiarity of Muslim fasting is not in the limitation of food composition but in the time of its consumption. Fasting during Ramadan is prescribed to strengthen Muslims in self-discipline and the exact fulfillment of God's orders. If a believer breaks the fast during Ramadan, they must repent and make up for the missed days later. If they see a person eating who is not observing the fast, they should remind them of the significance of fasting.

According to Islamic teachings, physical needs such as food, drink, and sexual desire are powerful influences in human life, making people dependent on them. Therefore, a Muslim is required to abstain from satisfying these needs every day for one month each year to develop the spiritual aspect of their nature. The voluntary endurance of hunger, thirst, and sexual abstinence contributes to liberation from the dominance of physical needs, allowing one to focus on spiritual goals and values. Thus, Ramadan offers a unique opportunity for Muslims to devote themselves to worship and spiritual growth.

Islamic prescriptions allow for some exemptions from fasting under specific conditions. Travelers, children, pregnant and lactating women, and the sick are exempt from fasting. Pregnant women can postpone their fast to a later date. One should not fast at all costs if they have health problems that make fasting physically difficult. In some cases, fasting is even prohibited if it is harmful to health. From a medical standpoint, there are conditions in which it is advisable to refrain from fasting:

- Severe type I diabetes;
- Difficult-to-control type I and II diabetes;
- Patients who do not follow medical prescriptions;
- Patients with complications such as secondary infections or very high-risk arterial hypertension;
- Patients with diabetes and ketoacidosis;
- Elderly individuals with musculoskeletal disorders;
- Those who experience two or more episodes of hypo- or hyperglycemia during Ramadan.

In some cases, fasting should be completely avoided, including:

- Patients with severe illnesses requiring external care;
- Patients with severe heart failure;
- Patients who have suffered extensive heart attacks or strokes;
- Severe hypertension;
- Severe kidney or liver disease;
- Acute exacerbations of chronic diseases;
- Acute infectious diseases;
- Pregnant and breastfeeding women;
- Patients with mental disorders;
- Elderly individuals over 75 years old.

If a doctor prescribes medications, it is not recommended to interrupt regular intake. However, consultation with a healthcare professional is necessary to adjust the timing and dosage of medication during fasting.

Those who are unable to fast due to health reasons may provide food for a needy person each day as a form of atonement.

The effect of fasting on the body

Observing the fast has many positive effects on human health, the most important being its strengthening of the immune system.

Fasting activates cellular mechanisms that enhance internal protection against external or metabolic stress while repairing damaged molecules. It stimulates immune cells in the bone marrow, aiding in recovery from illness. Additionally, fasting reduces cell damage, prevents inflammation, and may lower the risk of cancer.

Fasting can help decrease blood glucose levels by promoting fat metabolism instead of relying on glucose. This positively impacts metabolic disorders and blood pressure. Fasting also

supports the intestinal flora by encouraging the growth of beneficial bacteria that combat harmful microbes. The body's available energy is redirected from digestion to other essential functions, acting as a form of energy conservation.

Medical recommendations for those observing the fast during the Holy Month of Ramadan

General hygiene rules. The room should be ventilated at night. Wet cleaning of the premises daily. It is recommended to wear clothes made of natural materials. To make it easier to endure the daytime fast, it is recommended to take a nap during the day - about 20-40 minutes between 13:00 and 16:00.

Physical activity. It is necessary to refrain from physical activity, including visiting gyms, baths, saunas, limiting work in garden plots. It is not recommended to go to bed immediately after the morning meal, since hydrochloric acid is produced after eating, and when a person goes to bed on a full stomach, the likelihood of reflux of gastrointestinal contents into the esophagus increases. First of all, this is contraindicated for patients with gastroesophageal reflux disease.

Adaptation of the body to the fast The first day of fasting can be stressful for the body, but this stress is beneficial. After two or three days, the body already gets used to this regime. In Islam, in addition to the Ramadan fast, there is an additional fast of *nafl*. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) fasted every Monday and Thursday. To accustom the body, you can fast for several days at the beginning of the month of Ramadan.

Nutrition rules. You need to eat in strictly maintained proportions, breakfast before dawn should be hearty, and dinner after sunset - light. Tasty, healthy, vitaminized and varied food will contribute to good digestion and well-being for the whole day. Fasting people should avoid overeating and completely filling the stomach. You need to get up from the table without being completely full. The signal that the body is full reaches the brain only 20-30 minutes after eating. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: "The worst vessel that can be filled by the son of Adam (man) is his stomach. It is enough for a person to eat as much as he needs to maintain his strength.

Composition of products for fasting food. After a long fast, you should not immediately start eating. To start *iftar*, it is enough to eat 1-2 dates and water or 2-3 olives so that the stomach receives a signal and starts functioning normally. Soup, *ayran*, compote or milk are perfect for reducing the body's need for liquid, they will fill the void in the stomach and relieve a sharp feeling of hunger for a while. After such a start to eating, it is advisable to take a break. Foods containing protein tend to slow down the digestion process, hence a long feeling of satiety. When

choosing dishes, it is important to avoid excessively oily, fatty, fried foods, as well as overly sweet ones. Do not forget about vegetables, nuts, fruits and bread. For suhoor, it is best to eat eggs, jam, cheese, oatmeal, walnuts, bread, bananas and other fruits. The average daily fluid intake is about 2.5 liters. It is best to drink green tea, slightly salted water, try not to drink carbonated drinks, avoid very cold and sweet liquids. Coffee can be both beneficial and harmful; if the body is weakened, it may worsen the condition.

By following these recommendations, fasting can be observed comfortably, providing both spiritual and physical fulfillment.

Those fasting during Ramadan should maintain internal purity and avoid thoughts, temptations, and actions that defile the spirit.

May the Almighty bless you and accept your good intentions.

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